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The Story of the Russian School

By

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Translated with a foreword by

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FOREWORD

The translation of this book has given me immense pleasure, not only because it is the work of an old friend, but because, to use the current phrase, it fills a long-felt want. Several works exist on the Russian ballet as presented by Serge Diaghileff and on the Imperial ballet from which Diaghileff's forces were first largely recruited, while a number of works have been devoted to individual dancers, but never before have we been told the inside story of how the school of dancing that lay behind the ballet came into being. We have had the story of the stage, but we have never had the story of the class-room. It is that story, the story of the class-room, of the "school," that is presented to us in the following pages.

The author is the only living person capable of the task. The "Legat Saga" is intimately related to the Imperial Theatres of St. Petersburg and Moscow for a hundred years past. Legat's father was professor before him, while he himself inherited the chair of the greatest dancing master of all time, Christian Johannsen, at the latter's personal insistence. For these reasons the story receives an added interest through the strong personal touch.

But not alone of the class-room does Legat speak. He shows the intimate link between class-room and stage. He was the successor not only to the "deity" of the class-room, Christian Johannsen, but also to the then "deity" of chore-graphic art, Marius Petipa, and knowing both of them in-

timately, he reveals aspects of their characters and their workmanship which throw much new light on the part these titans played in the growth and development of the ballet.

Indubitably it is to be regretted that Legat did not see his way to give his talents to Western Europe when Diaghileff first invited him to his nascent enterprise over twenty years ago. But was he to be blamed? He was the first ever to achieve the distinction of holding simultaneously the triple position of First Soloist, Balletmaster, and Professor of the highest class of the Ballet School. Moreover, Legat, though of Swedish descent, is essentially Russian to the core. He possesses none of that cosmopolitanism that prompted many other artistes to leave Russia young and exploit abroad the knowledge their schooling had given them. Clinging to Russian habits, customs, and manner of thinking, and having blazoned his name but little beyond the confines of his homeland, he is, unlike many others, less known to western Europe than to his native country, where the name of Legat was a household word in artistic circles throughout the length and breadth of the land.

I shall never forget a brilliant ballet evening at the Imperial Marinsky Theatre in the month of January, 1914. It was one of those occasions for which it was quite impossible for any but the most influential to procure tickets, but M. Tartakoff, the director of the Theatre and a good friend, relaxed so far as to allow me to stand just inside of the door of the centre aisle. The audience was composed

of the elite of the Russian nobility. The place blazed with jewels and uniforms. The strains of the National Anthem sounded, everyone rose, and all eyes were fixed on the Imperial box as the Tsar, the Tsarina, and the Imperial family entered and took their places. The orchestra, under Richard Drigo, broke into the overture and the curtain rose on the ballet *Esmeralda*. It was a gala night, but it was also more than that, it was a jubilee night. One by one the chief artists emerged to meet with warm receptions — the beautiful Matilda Kshesinskaya as *Esmeralda*, the dignified Paul Gerdt as *Frolo*, the celebrated mime Stukolkin as *Quasimodo*. Then about half way through the first act, a slight figure in a green jerkin, the poet Gringoire, was dragged on the stage by brigands. Suddenly the performance came to a stop. The entire auditorium rose to its feet. Even the Tsar stood. On the stage the performers deserted their positions to acclaim their colleague, who remained in the centre bowing incessantly, clearly moved to tears by this acclamation.

The poet Gringoire was Nicolas Legat, and the occasion the celebration of his jubilee of twenty-five years' service in the Imperial Theatre. The demonstration, which lasted a good fifteen minutes, and was repeated again in the next two acts, was a tribute of public admiration. In the last act, tables were brought on and piled with gifts and presents, while the hero of the day received address after address from countless organisations. One telegram read :

Terpsichora tiem bogata
Shto ti nam dala Legata
(Terpsichore has shown her riches
By giving us Legat).

And now, seventeen years later, that slight figure of the erstwhile poet Gringoire sits daily in his London studio, with infinite patience and kindly encouragement transmitting to others the art that raised him to such heights. It is above all in the studio that this artistic colossus is most at home. Since soloist days he is the teacher, the pedagogue, par excellence. Modest and unassuming, invariably cheerful, carrying his sixty years as if they were thirty, keenly conscious of his profound knowledge not only of the externals of his art but also of the muscles of the human frame that execute the slightest movements — that knowledge which has made of him the foremost teacher of the Russian school of dancing since the death of Christian Johannsen—Legat with delicate hand adjusts an erring movement, directs the exercises, or accompanies them with an endless variety of original tunes on the piano or violin. Out of hours he is fonder of “swapping stories” or drawing comic cartoons than of “talking shop.” His is one of those rare natures that never grow old. He is happiest of all with children, and amuses them just as years ago he used to amuse his colleagues with sleight-of-hand and juggling tricks on their long tours throughout Russia.

Like a noble and magnificent tree, the Russian school of

ballet has spread its branches throughout the world, and, as is usual with trees, it is for its foliage that it is chiefly admired. But the arborist looks deeper, he looks at the trunk and the roots. The roots of the Russian school were planted by his predecessors, but in Nicolas Legat we have the trunk.

PAUL DUKES

CHAPTER I.

WHENCE CAME THE "RUSSIAN SCHOOL"?

The second half of the nineteenth century in Russia was marked by a florescence of art, music, literature and science unparalleled in the history of the world.

During the first half of the century we were still under the powerful domination of foreign influences. It was to French, Italian and German artists and composers that the Court looked for æsthetic guidance. Russia was dormant. The great bear was still hibernating, æsthetically the great bear was born and grew up hibernating, and none suspected the hidden powers gestating in its silent massive form.

To the outside world Russia was a land of mystery, whose representatives, the few who travelled, were characterized by a strange breadth of vision, refinement of culture, and a manner of life distinguished by freedom from the trammels that commonly bound European society. Was not the "Russian prince" a necessary figure in almost every mystery novel? But since these wandering Russian nobles adapted themselves with ease and grace to every European mode, Europe did not bother its head about the land that produced them. Whatever the "princes" were, Russia was considered barbaric.

But with the rise of modern art in Europe Russia suddenly awoke, burst into life, leapt into astounding activity, and in every branch of intellectual life not only kept abreast of Europe but often outran her.

The "Russian school" of literature with Pushkin, Lermontoff, Gogol, Dostoevsky, Turgenev, Tolstoy and Chekhoff became a European craze. The "Russian school" of painting, from Vereschagin, Repine, Aivazovsky, Seroff to Roerich and Bakst, established new models in art. The "Russian school" of music, with Tschaikovsky still betraying his homage to the Italian cult, soon shook itself free from this tutelage, and in Balakirev, Borodin, Moussorgsky, Rimsky-Korsakoff and Glazounoff proved its complete independence and unique originality. And side by side with these was born the "Russian school" of dancing, culminating in that superb and unprecedented phenomenon, the Imperial Russian Ballet.

Whence came this "school"? Who made it? Whose genius formed and modelled it?

Ballet existed in Russia long ago. Rich land magnates kept their own dancing troupes and presented their best dancers to the Court. Thus originated the Court Ballet, which later became the Imperial Ballet. For technical guidance, in dancing as in other arts, authorities were invited from abroad. Among the best known ballet-masters of the early part of last century were the Frenchmen Didelot and

Perrot. The former became a rich man and established a scholarship for the Imperial Theatre School. I was one of the winners of this scholarship and thus paid my way through the Theatre School.

The secret of the development of Russian dancing lay in the fact that we learnt from everybody and adapted what we learnt to ourselves. We copied, borrowed from, and emulated every source that gave us inspiration, and then, working on our acquired knowledge and lending it the stamp of the Russian national genius, we moulded it into the eclectic art of the Russian ballet.

From the beginning of the second half of the last century the scene is dominated by two masterly figures — Marius Petipa, the choreographer, and Christian Johanness, the professor. Both lived to a great age, and between them were mainly responsible for that perfection of development of individual technique and choregraphic construction which arrived at full bloom in the first quarter of the present century. It was upon the foundation laid by these two men that the “new” school of Fokine and others was built.

In a later chapter I shall deal in detail with these outstanding personalities, both of whom I knew intimately. Here I will merely pause to point out that neither of them was Russian by birth, though both became Russian by adopted nationality. Petipa was a Frenchman. His father before him occupied the post of first maitre de ballet of the

Russian Imperial Theatres, and Marius succeeded to the post. Christian Johannsen, who for over sixty years was professor at the Theatre School, was a Swede. He was a pupil of the Bournonvilles (father and son), who in turn were pupils of Vestris. The French succession was also handed down to my father, Gustav Legat, who was professor at the Imperial Theatre School in Moscow. He was the most trusted pupil of Johannsen before myself, and when Johannsen could not accept private engagements he always sent my father in his place. My mother was Russian, but my father, like Johannsen, was a Swede, though he and Johannsen always spoke French together. But my father's mother, my grandmother, was Constance Ledé, a French-woman, and a brilliant dancer in her time.

Christian Johannsen always used to say to me : "The Russian school is the French school, only the French have forgotten it." How true this was I discovered when I came to make my debut at the Paris Grand Opera. I was dancing with Matilda Kshesinskaya, and we were very nervous, for Russians were still regarded as semi-barbarians at the beginning of this century. Before the rehearsal we keenly felt the supercilious attitude of our French colleagues. But when they saw our work, what a sensation! What stupefaction we caused! Mme. Mory, then chief ballet mistress at the Grand Opera, fell on our necks and exclaimed : "Voilà des vrais danseurs, jamais je n'ai vu pareils!" And the then assistant ballet-master, Leo Staats, asked me : "Tell me, please, what school is yours?" If

any question could have astonished me, it was surely this! But I answered the simple truth. "Yours," I said, "your school, the French school, which you have lost, but which we Russians have not only preserved but have poured into it our Russian soul!"

Staats asked to be allowed to work with me, and I consented with pleasure. But his study did not last long; in twenty minutes of my ordinary exercises he was exhausted, excused himself on the ground of not feeling well, and that was the end of his lessons!

Though the Russian school first derived its technique from France, it had already acquired by the middle of last century an international aspect through the influential personalities of Johannsen and my father and through guest-performers from many parts of Europe. Taglioni, Grisi, Fanny Elssler and others became in turn the idols of Russian balletomanes. Especially in the 'eighties a number of brilliant Italian dancers came to Russia, and as their names are still fresh in the memory of the present generation, and their influence gave a powerful impetus to the growing art of ballet at the time, I intend to deal first with this group of dancers and the part they played.

The first of this group was Virginia Zucchi, whom I remember very well, appearing with her in minor roles on the stage in my youth. She danced first at a suburban pleasure-garden or music hall on the outskirts of St. Peters-

burg. She had a captivating personality and powerful talent, both for drama and comedy, which made so strong an appeal that she received an invitation to appear as a guest on the Imperial stage, and was later accepted into the ballet company. I remember her best in *Esmeralda* and *Pharaoh's Daughter*, in the latter of which I played as a pupil the part of the monkey. Zucchi always aroused my inexpressible admiration by her marvellous mimicry, her hypnotic acting. Her success led to other Italians being invited to various theatres in Russia (Italian opera and drama in St. Petersburg were at their height, and this gave the Italians added popularity). Zucchi was followed by Brianza, Delera, Limido, Cecchetti, Coppini (ballet master), Legnani and Grimaldi. With the younger of these ballerinas, Legnani and Brianza, I danced as partner in my young days. With the others I took part on the stage in minor roles. But I see them all before my mind's eye as if it were yesterday.

The only male dancer of the Italian group was Enrico Cecchetti. He was about forty-five years of age when he came to Russia, and at the very height of his career, but too old to modify his school of *tours de force* or round out his dexterity with the dignity and poise which were then the outstanding attributes of the Russian school. The first time I ever saw him dance was at a music-hall in the pleasure-garden Arcadia. I was sixteen at the time. To say that I was dazed by what appeared then to be the amazing virtuosity of the little Italian would be expressing it mildly. I came out literally staggered. Eight pirouettes! And on the stage of the Imperial Marinsky Theatre and in



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ar
1 the Theatre School our dancers were content with four!
an Cecchetti was partnering Limido, and these two made a
th perfect combination. They were both very small, but grace-
wful and well-built. Limido was in my opinion the greatest
th of all the Italians and one of the greatest dancers of all time.
ye In pure technique she excelled all others, and it was well-
nigh incredible that when she came to Russia she was
already fifty years of age. Cecchetti was referred to in the
press as "that bone-splitting specialist of vertiginous dex-
terity." My father used to take me to see this remarkable
pair every day. I had just entered the senior class of the
Theatre School at the time, and at my request my father
introduced me to Cecchetti, and I stood long shaking his
hand, expressing in ardent terms my youthful admiration.
When I had graduated and was a soloist in the Marinsky
Theatre Cecchetti and I became great friends.

All these dancers, when they came to Russia, were in
their prime. We found that they had a school all their
own, which was distinguished by remarkable dexterity and
sensational brilliance. Their tours, their pirouettes, their
fouettés were all superior to our own. Their manners, on
the other hand, often lacked grace; theirs was a school of
tours de force; taste was sacrificed to effect and dexterity.
But we Russians had not invited them to criticize them.
We readily acknowledged their technical superiority, and
promptly set about to imitate, adapt, and ultimately to excel
their technique.

From that moment onward we set ourselves the deliberate goal of learning the Italian tricks. In our spare time we turned pirouettes and double *lours* for hours, sometimes until we were even on the point of fainting. At the same time I lost no opportunity of watching the Italians, especially Cecchetti and Legnani, at their work, observing the holding of their body and which muscles they controlled. I learnt a great deal from these observations. Already, when I was given my debut at the Marinsky Theatre, double *lours*, *entrechat-huits*, six or seven pirouettes were pretty easy for me, and the newspapers said that all the prior generation of dancers, including Cecchetti, would have to look to their laurels. But the climax of our technical achievements was not reached until considerably later.

The leaders in this movement to outdo the Italians in their own speciality were my brother Serge, Egor Khasht and myself, and we were eagerly followed by all the dancers of our generation. The advantage in this friendly rivalry was all on our side, for whereas the group of Italian dancers were all in their prime, finished dancers of thirty-five to fifty years of age, we of the succeeding Russian generation were young and burning with desire to learn — to learn from anywhere and anyone. We were fresher and physically stronger. I remember once when my brother and I were wrestling in our dressing room, Cecchetti looking on (we shared the same dressing room) said: "I'll put either of you 'puppies' down like a feather." I let him try on me for a time, and then, making an effort, I lifted him with one

arm and pinned him to the floor. (In my best days I lifted 150 pounds with one hand). But this rivalry in no way affected our friendship or the respect and admiration of the "puppies" for the full-bred "lions." Enrico Cecchetti was a great dancer, and we owe an inestimable debt to all the Italians who gave such an impetus to our art forty years ago.

Among the Italian dancers a special position was occupied by Legnani. She was one of the later arrivals, and the only one who manifested a desire to learn from the Russians. The others considered the technical equipment they had brought with them all-sufficing. Legnani, being nearer our own generation, continued to study.

At her debut in the ballet *Zolushka* there was a dramatic pause in the coda. Legnani walked to the centre of the stage, signalled to the conductor, and executed thirty-two *fouettés* in one spot. The feat brought the house down, and marked an epoch in the progress of pure technique on our stage.

To appreciate the overwhelming effect of this purely technical and nowadays common dancing trick on the balletomane audiences of that time the reader must imagine the atmosphere of the period. It was the period of bloom of Russian art and Russian literature. New schools, new tendencies, new groupings of thought, were springing up on every hand. Every striking new departure was hailed

either as a step towards artistic or philosophic liberation by its supporters, or denounced by effervescent critics as a plunge towards perdition. But nothing was received with indifference. In the realm of ballet the Italians had given a tremendous impulse to Russian art by their specific development of technique. Our dancers, male and female, our balletomane critics, even our professors raved technique, and when Legnani, by first performing this hitherto unknown *tour de force*, outdid her own compatriots in their own special sphere, she left both colleagues and spectators stunned.

Cecchetti was now teaching, and our dancers flocked to him to learn the Italian technique, and especially the thirty-two *fouettés*. But try as they might they were unable to acquire this trick. Legnani, however, was a very great friend of mine, and I was her favourite partner. Prior to dancing with me Legnani danced by preference with Paul Gerdt, but one day, when Gerdt had sprained his ankle, Petipa appointed me in his place, and from that moment Legnani and I became almost inseparable stage companions. She was anxious to round off the Italian angularity of her dancing by acquiring Russian poise and line; I was anxious to acquire the Italian technique and adapt it to our school. We became working comrades, and for three years practised together daily in the same studio. All this time I observed her closely.

Our star ballerina at the time was Matilda Kshesinskaya. She too struggled to acquire from Cecchetti the famous thirty-two *fouettés*. But neither he nor Legnani herself were able to make her do it. One day, when I was watching, I said to Matilda: "Try it like this," and I put her in a certain position. "Tighten this muscle, and at every turn relax and contract it, making such and such a movement with the head." Up to that time she always fell about the seventh or eighth turn. The first time she tried my method she turned about a dozen times. Then she began working with me systematically, and soon acquired the thirty-two *fouettés* to perfection. A short time later she did Legnani's feat on the Marinsky stage amid indescribable enthusiasm. And on the following morning I received a gift of a gold cigar-case and a note of grateful thanks from a certain very exalted personage.

Legnani was as mystified as Kshesinskaya that a youthful Russian was able to teach the most sensational of the Italian tricks. But the secret was simple. I had observed very closely, and had discovered exactly how Legnani held her body. After that many of our dancers came to me to learn Italian technique. I taught the *fouettés* to Vera Trefilova, Vil, Vaganova; later to Nicolaeva and many others, and now it is a common feat. And I found I also had success with the men. My brother graduated six years after me. All those years I trained him in special technique, while my father carried on his general instruction, and at his final examination from the Theatre School, Serge Legat executed fourteen *cou-de-pied* pirouettes at one stroke.

From now onward, though we continued to acknowledge the priority of the Italians both on account of age and precedence, we no longer doubted that we should acquire all they had to give and greatly improve their school. The embellishments they offered were accepted not only by us, the eager aspirants of the succeeding generation, but also by the teachers of the Theatre School, and incorporated into the Russian system. The trick of holding the head to the audience during pirouettes, for instance, was at once adopted by Johannsen, Petipa, my father, and all the Russian teachers. It was only when they saw the stage occupied by a group of Italians sacrificing everything to a display of fireworks that those old titans, Johannsen and Petipa, would hang their heads.

The desire to exploit Italian technique to the utmost was exemplified by the invitation to Enrico Cecchetti to form a class at the Imperial Theatre School. It was referred to as the "parallel" class, and was for girls only. Cecchetti was as brilliant a teacher as he was dancer, exceedingly thorough and painstaking, though terribly hot-tempered. But he taught the Italian style only, and if the class lasted only a few years it was certainly not because the Italians were not good pedagogues, but because the Russians quickly assimilated the Italian technique and lent it that superior grace which was the heritage of the Russian School.

For many years Cecchetti became one of the most prominent figures in the ballet world in St. Petersburg. His

pupil Albertieri acted for a time as his substitute, and I remember how the hot-tempered Cecchetti in a fit of anger would chase the unfortunate Albertieri brandishing a stick or violin-bow or anything that came to his hand, and five minutes later they would shed tears of reciprocal contrition. They were great people, those Italians, and we loved them dearly. But there was one striking difference between them and the two greatest figures of the time, Petipa and Johanssen, who were building up what finally became the Russian school. Whereas both of the latter became Russian, Cecchetti and his compatriots never did so; they came to Russia Italians, lived there as Italians, and left Italians, scarcely able to speak the Russian language despite their years of residence, and absorbing nothing of the national character.

Nevertheless, lest I lay myself open to misunderstanding, let me repeat that I consider we owe as great a debt to the Italians as to the Scandinavians and the French, from whom our teachers, our ballet masters and our original school sprang; and none is more willing than I, who spent years in copying them, to acknowledge it. But the mistake of the Italians was to rely almost exclusively upon technique and virtuosity in their dancing. Carried away by the sensation these caused they regarded them as all-sufficing. They came to Russia too late to unlearn them, and without in any way depreciating the high qualities of the Italian dancers, it none the less remains a reflection upon the Russian school to say that it does not differ essentially in certain respects from the Italian.

Without embarking in this limited space on an analysis of the two systems, it may be said briefly that the differences lie, firstly in principle, and secondly in taste. One of the principles of the Russian school is that of balanced training; the Italians, on the contrary, permitted a great deal of one-sidedness for the sake of superficial effect. Enrico Cecchetti, for example, though a brilliant pirouettist, could only do pirouettes and *tours en l'air* in one direction. We used sometimes to tease him into trying the other direction, and this would make him angry. A series of double *tours* in alternate directions, often done by our dancers, was beyond him. Our dancers eventually did seven or eight pirouettes habitually in their solos, but they did them in either direction at will. Whether they outdid others in this or not was merely incidental, it was the principle of balanced training that was at stake. We rejected a number of easy effects obtained at the cost of beauty and grace, and we avoided those faults of *épaulement* and carriage which are always marked in the Italian school. To the untrained eye these differences may appear insignificant. But it was our refusal to sacrifice æsthetics to effect, combined with our success in adopting and adapting Italian technique, that enabled us in the generation that followed the arrival of the Italians in Russia to produce the greatest dancers of the past four decades.

Thus the "Russian" school of dancing is an eclectic school — the French, the Scandinavian, the Italian — all welded into an artistic whole by the genius of the Russian people

in that age of art and letters that produced also Tchaikovsky and Rimsky-Korsakoff, Tolstoy and Turgenieff, Repine and Bakst . . . But there is this distinction between composers, writers and painters on the one hand, and dancers on the other, that the art of the latter cannot be recorded on canvas or on paper; it lives in our bodies and in our hearts; and paying homage to all from whom we derived our art, it is for us of that great generation to hold the torch aloft, and with it light coming generations on their way.

CHAPTER II.

THE MEN WHO MADE THE RUSSIAN SCHOOL

I have spoken first of the Italians because, being the latest, they were also the best known of the foreign groups of artists who influenced the Russian ballet. But it must not be supposed that they in any way held a monopoly of our stage, despite the craze of the 'eighties and early 'nineties for Italian ballet, opera, music, and Italian art in general. There were great contemporary dancers of our own school too, who in some respects were superior to the Italians.

Particularly I recall E. Vazem, E. Sokolova, M. Gorshenkova, all pupils of Johannsen. Among the men, Stukolkin was the great mime of that period, and among classic or character dancers there were many who were distinguished: Felix Kshesinsky, Gustav Legat, Platon Karsavin (father of Tamara Karsavina), Paul Gerdt (her godfather and teacher), Litavkin, Hillert, Bekefy The younger of the above-named men, such as Gerdt and Bekefy, I always think of as of my own period, for though they were older than myself I was almost immediately classed with them at the commencement of my career on the Marinsky stage.

My family's association with the Imperial Ballet dates back over a hundred years. My grandfather, who was a Swede, was invited into the Imperial ballet company by the Emperor Nicolas I.

Long, long ago this connection began, in the reign of Nicolas I, when People's Theatres used to be constructed in St. Isaac's Square and on the Field of Mars at St. Petersburg. Popularly these theatres were called *Balagani*. The first scene of Stravinsky's ballet *Petrushka* shows the outside of a *Balagan* and the shows were given in a tent or a portable wooden structure. They were run by my grandfather and his brother, Ivan and Samuel Legat, known as the "inseparables." Ivan was the ballet-master and scenic designer, and Samuel the engineer. Their first shows bore a somewhat military character, but they soon introduced pantomimes, with all kinds of transformations, disappearances, and tricks. Then they introduced dancing, and here, under a pseudonym, my father made his first appearances. He danced with his mother, Constance Lede, who was slim and small and just the right height for him. He was Harlequin and she Columbine. These *Balagani* became quite an institution, and were visited by the Tsar on several occasions. Artistes of the Imperial Theatres also often came to see the performances.

At that time there was a renowned bass by name Petroff who sang at the Opera. On the occasion of his jubilee performance it was decided to give Meyerbeer's opera



YIP HING

1911

Freischütz. Petroff begged the Director of the Imperial Theatres to invite Ivan and Samuel to produce the magician scene of this opera, and thus they were introduced to the Imperial stage. Their creations caused a great sensation, and the Tsar Nicolas I, who was present, gave them each a gold watch with his initial, and at his command they became permanent members of the company.

Christian Johannsen, impelled by the mystery of Russia and the growing interest in Russian art, came to St. Petersburg from Sweden when still a youth about the end of the first quarter of the last century. He was a pupil of the famous Bournonvilles, who in their turn were pupils of the still more famous Vestris. While the Russians assimilated and perfected the distinctive features of the French and Italian schools, on the pedagogic side there is a clear heritage through the Bournonvilles, Johannsen, Gustav Legat and myself from Vestris. This explains why we excelled, not only in developing the art of the ballet to the highest degree, but also in transmitting it to others. Once settled in Russia, Johannsen never again left the country. He became naturalized, took a Russian wife, and learnt the language well, with only a slight accent. His success as a dancer was secured from his first appearance, and he was at once accepted into the Imperial troupe. He was of a most hardy constitution, and never wore more than a thin cotton jacket. He used to relate how, soon after he first came to Russia, one fine winter day he was walking down the Nevski Prospect, keenly enjoying the frosty air, when a policeman stopped him, seized a handful

of snow and started rubbing his nose with it energetically. Johannsen's nose was frozen white, and the policeman had noticed it, though he himself had not!

He kept his robust health even into advanced old age, and I never heard of his having a day's illness. I remember, when he was about eighty, his entering the school building with Marius Petipa, then about seventy-five. With the agility of a man of forty Johannsen ran up the stairs two steps at a time, and turning round to laugh at Petipa laboriously mounting, chaffed him with: "*Eh Starik!*" ("Oh, you old 'un!"). Among the collection of literature I lost in the revolution was a report of an appearance of Johannsen at the age of fifty-nine. This report said: "This remarkable dancer has made still further progress." Still further progress — at fifty-nine! Of such stuff were made the men who made the Russian School.

But I personally knew him, of course, only as a teacher. The figure I remember is one of medium height, sturdy, with a powerful chest, grey hair and thick eyebrows, light-blue eyes, a small hooked nose and a short cut moustache and beard.

He was a brilliant dancer in his younger days, my father always told me, his dancing being characterised by great energy and life combined with perfection of finish. Even in his older days, when I worked under him in the classroom, he would astonish us occasionally by demonstrating without any practice a chain of steps, ending up with a series of

flashing pirouettes, and come suddenly to a dead standstill in an irreproachable arabesque. There was something positively uncanny about it.

He was extremely methodical and unfailingly regular in his habits. He was always in the classroom ahead of time, and prepared the floor himself by watering it. Then he would take his violin, seat himself at the end of the room, and curtly open the class after the minimum of preliminary civilities.

He hated smoking and used to say : " Ugh, why do you tear your lungs to bits with that filth!" But he himself loved snuff, and took copious pinches of it.

He was very sparing in words, severe in his criticisms, and laconic in his condemnations. The very highest compliment he ever paid anyone was : " Now you may do that in public." And the pupil then knew he had achieved perfection. So that many of our artistes were afraid of Johannsen, and indeed his tuition was for none but those who with perseverance and enthusiasm aimed at the highest. Towards others he was ruthless and sarcastic. From the first I felt a passionate devotion to this grand old man, and a keen insight into his methods. I became his favourite pupil, and worked many happy hours with him out of school time. He used me as his assistant and delegated work to me long before he retired. From him I acquired the very essence of his school, and found myself imitating many of his manners, even to the preference for accompanying

my instruction on the violin rather than the piano. If I drew the line anywhere, it was only in not imitating his overawing severity. I love to encourage my pupils, and not to reprimand them in their difficulties.

In his teaching Johannsen exhibited the most extraordinary versatility, ingenuity and variety. In this he differed from the Italians who taught in Russia, and whose method of teaching was much more stereotyped. Enrico Cecchetti, for instance, even had hanging on his classroom wall a sort of menu of exercises for the week: Monday such-and-such movements, Tuesday such-and-such, and so on. This system was severely criticized by Johannsen, who declared that it displayed paucity of imagination, stunted the inventive faculty, and led to too mechanical development. As for himself, it was said that in all the sixty odd years of his professorship in Russia he never gave two lessons alike or repeated the same combination of exercises twice.

It was this inexhaustible ingenuity, combined with a penetrating insight into the peculiarities and possibilities of individual pupils, that made study under Johannsen a fascinating experience in itself. His classroom became a real fairyland of movement, with the severe but benevolent old sorcerer waving his magic violin wand and awaking to life our most secret and often unlooked-for artistic capacities.

How many thousands upon thousands of combinations of steps he invented on the spur of the moment, weaving them into nets of bewitching line and motion — and never

the same twice! Some of our pupils tried to write down these combinations and record them. But Johannsen did not encourage this. His combinations and chains of steps were inspirations of the moment, designed for the moment and for individuals of the moment. By stereotyped repetition from record they must inevitably suffer. What he encouraged in his pupils was the faculty to invent and combine chains of steps for themselves.

What Christian Johannsen was as professor, Marius Petipa was as balletmaster and producer. Between them these men dominated the development of the Russian ballet during the entire second half of the nineteenth century, and formed the Russian School as we knew it up to the time of the great war. The one was the deity of the classroom, the other of the stage, and their word in their respective departments was absolute.

Marius Petipa (or Petitpas, as the name was originally in French) was never invited to Russia: he came of his own accord, prompted by his natural initiative, and his arrival was typical of the man. His father was maitre de ballet of the Imperial Theatres before him, and he was told to invite his son Ivan, a good classic dancer from Marseilles. Not to be outdone in "the rush to Russia" of that period, the enterprising Marius turned up ahead of his brother and stole his job.

Marius Petipa did not excel as a classic dancer, but was an agile and talented interpreter of character dancing, dis-

tinguishing himself especially in Spanish dances, which he had studied in Spain. He was also a splendid actor and an able supporter.

After the death of his father he succeeded to the post of balletmaster of the Imperial Theatres. He settled in Russia permanently, became a Russian subject, lived there over seventy years, served under four Emperors, and was awarded many decorations.

Young, handsome, gay and gifted, to the end of his days an inveterate *bon viveur*, he at once won popularity among the artistes. He was the life and soul of every gathering, and kept things always on the go by his stories, jokes, and even juggling abilities, which he was fond of demonstrating at table. My earliest recollections of him date from my childhood. He was godfather to one of my sisters, and a great friend of my family. I was very fond of him and very devoted to him.

But in his profession he was very severe, and never allowed the least favouritism. Though he finally gave me the principal rôles in all his later ballets, and I set many *pas de deux* for him that passed under his name, he never paid much attention to me in my youth. I had to prove my worth first, and I was over twenty-six before he gave me a leading rôle. But after I had set the debut dances first of his daughter Lubov, then of Tamara Karsavina and one or two others he called upon me more and more and I became thoroughly permeated with his ideas. One of his



favourite compositions was a *pas de trois* in the ballet *Paquita*, which was danced by Kshesinskaya, Anna Johanssen, and myself. Petipa used to call this his "golden *pas de trois*." "Imposs better tance!" he used to say in broken Russian.

Altogether Petipa produced some one hundred and fifty ballets, besides many *pas de deux* and solo numbers. His speciality was women's solos. Here he excelled by his mastery and taste. All his ballets were distinguished by variety of character and great imagination.

As a single instance of Petipa's work I will describe the creation of Tchaikowsky's famous ballet *The Sleeping Beauty*. This ballet was staged by direct order of the Emperor Alexander III. I shall never forget how Petipa tested the patient Tchaikowsky to the utmost with his capricious exactions. More accustomed to the orthodox forms of Pagni and Minkus, Petipa at first found it difficult to adapt himself to the famous Russian composer's novel arrangements, and constantly demanded that tempos should be altered and cuts and additions made, with all of which demands Tchaikowsky obligingly complied.

On the opening night the role of the Sleeping Beauty was performed by the Italian ballerina Brianza. The four bridegrooms were Karsavin, Oblahoff, Gillert and myself. Gerdt was the prince and Cecchetti the Witch. Petipa himself played the role of the Fairy Sirene. The Bluebird

was Varvara Nikitina and her partner Cecchetti. The good fairies were Anna Johannsen, Kulichevskaya, Zhukova and Rikhliakhova. The Cats were played by Anderson and Bekefy. Many others later played the leading role, among them being Kshesinskaya, Preobrazhenskaya, Trefilova, Karsavina and Anna Pavlova. The last-named, however, was not fond of this role, there being too little mimicry in it for her liking. Her favourite ballet was *Giselle*, in which her acting talent found brilliant scope, and where in the second act, in the cemetery, she was able to display her ethereal inspired dancing.

Whenever Petipa set about producing a ballet he waited till absolute silence reigned in the hall. Then, consulting the notes he had composed at home he would methodically begin work. He worked out many of his groupings at home, where he used little figures like chess pawns to represent dancers, arranging them all over the table. He would spend long hours studying these groupings and write down the successful ones in his note book. Separate numbers, solos and *pas de deux* he composed at the rehearsals.

First he had the music played through. Then he would sit for a time in deep thought. Then he would usually ask for the music to be played again, imaging the dance, making little gestures, and moving his eyebrows. In the middle he would jump up and cry: "Enough!" He would then compose the dance eight bars at a time, call the dancer to him, and explain the movements at first in words rather than gestures. The whole dance having been explained, the

dancer began again from the beginning, while Petipa frequently stopped, corrected or modified the movements. In the end he would say : " Now try nice," which meant the artiste might try to execute the finished dance.

For women Petipa was the ideal dance composer. He had an amazing capacity for finding the most advantageous movements for each danseuse, so that the end result looked both simple and graceful. He rarely gave combinations involving high technique, but paid chief attention to grace and beauty of line and pose.

For men, he was unable to compose effective dances. We almost always had to modify or develop them to suit our style, and we used to consult Johannsen on this, he being for men what Petipa was for women as a dance composer.

The most fascinating moments of all were those when Petipa composed his mimic scenes. Showing each participant in turn he would get quite carried away by the parts, and the whole hall would sit with bated breath, following the extraordinary expressive mimicry of this artistic giant. When the scene was set there would be a terrific outburst of applause, but Petipa paid little attention. He would return quietly to his seat, smiling and licking his lips in a characteristic gesture, lighting a cigarette, and sitting silent for a time. Then the whole scene would be repeated while Petipa put finishing touches to the actions of the individual artistes.

The Sleeping Beauty was one of Petipa's most successful productions. More than two hundred performances were given in my time, always with enormous success. I took part in practically every performance, playing at first the role of one of the bridegrooms and later the Prince Charming.

Although he lived more than seventy years in Russia Petipa never learned to speak the language properly, though he understood all that was said to him. It was amusing to hear him give instructions. Bystanders often could barely refrain from laughing. For instance, when he was selecting artistes for certain roles he would go up to them, stare long through his spectacles and finally say: "Ya dum ke ti moj probrop!" (Which might be rendered thus: "I tink thou able try!" — Trans.)

He said "thou" to everybody because he had known us all at school. When anyone made a mistake at rehearsals he would shout out: "Stoi, stoi, kakoi nistchas madam kakoi ti skvern ogurtsi!" (Which might be rendered: "Stop, stop, what miserable madam, what you are bad cucumber!"). To a question from a woman soloist who thought she had done wonderfully, Petipa snapped: "Ni gratz, ni elevatz, kakoi nistchaz!" (A rhyme which might be rendered: "No grace, no spring, what sorry thing!"). His exclamations when he got angry were often quite unparliamentary.

Much was written about Petipa to explain his "system,"

but most of it was quite beside the point. This was his system: to look for beauty, grace, and simplicity, and obey no other rules. In producing, the first thing he considered was his material. To change an artiste or the number of participants was in his eyes to change the production, so that to imitate him with other material was to travesty him. Moreover his greatness lay partly in that he recognized his limitations. A genius for women's solos, he rarely set men's dances well. He knew this, and did not object to our consulting Johannsen about them, while in Petipa's later ballets I set a good many of the men's solos and *pas de deux*.

I never made any deep philosophical analysis of his methods, perhaps because words and analyses don't interest me. It was enough for me that when Petipa had no time to set some new dance that had been ordered he would call me and say: "Eto ti diel" ("You do it"). And I did it, proud that the dance should pass under his name. And "Marius," as we all spoke of him, always said afterwards "Da, ti karasha komposi" ("Yes, you composed well").

To get ideas for the men's solos Petipa would often sit through Johannsen's class, fingering his pencil and notebook. And after class Johannsen would wink and say: "The old man's pinched some more." (Johannsen would never admit that he himself was old!)

These two titans Petipa and Johannsen, so dissimilar in character, were none the less good friends, and admired

each other. There was a sardonic dryness about them. They lived for their work and ignored the conventionalities. When Johannsen's friend and colleague, Lev Ivanoff, instructor of the Junior Class, died at the age of about 70, I came to tell Johannsen the sad news. Instead of saying "Oh, how sad," he burst out laughing. "Ha, ha, ha," he exclaimed, shaking a forefinger, "it must have been his debts strangled him!"

Petipa was similar. When Johannsen died at the age of 94 the news was communicated to Petipa (himself already a very old man) during a rehearsal. All he said was : "Ah? we must die once," and continued the rehearsal.

Johannsen taught until the year of his death. His wife died one month before him and this was to him a terrible blow. His life-long companion in the flesh, he could not bear being parted from her for a moment, even in death, and at night he stole into the chamber where she lay to fondle her cold face. Coming out he struck his head against the doorpost and brought on a stroke of paralysis. I shall never forget calling on him next day. The stroke had in some way affected his vocal organs and he was unable to speak. He seized his chin with his hand and worked it angrily up and down to indicate the misfortune that had come upon him. Within a month he followed his wife to the grave, and thus there passed away the Grand Old Man of the dance, a giant in his art, who elevated the technique of the ballet to superhuman levels, and imbued it with the dignity of a religion.

CHAPTER III.

THE MAKING OF A DANCER AND BALLET MASTER

The physical training which all aspirants to eminence in the ballet were put through at the Theatre School was very severe. The pupils were vowed to the service of Terpsichore, and to this service all other things, including sometimes the interests of general education, were sacrificed. The "bad boys" of the school were forgiven everything if only they were good artistes, and my own Theatre School memories are profusely interspersed with schoolboy pranks, subterfuges to escape the penalties of unlearned lessons, and tricks played on teachers. Our geography teacher was enamoured of Zucchi, and a good three-quarters of every geography lesson was taken up (at our initiative) with eulogies of Zucchi's incomparable charms. Our German teacher was short-sighted and paid dearly for this defect. My keenest recollection of him is with a stream of ink trickling down his cheek from an inkpot I had concealed in his hat. Let it be frankly admitted that I was a thoroughly bad boy and never learnt my lessons, but, armed with a Didelot scholarship, I passed through school with the ease of a launched vessel gliding into the waiting waters.

But impatience with imposed book-lore was but a measure of my eagerness to reach the dancing class-room or gymnasium. Every moment of free time was occupied in either dancing or studying others dance, or in music (I played the piano, the violin and the balalaika), or in wrestling, boxing, gymnastics or some form of sport that improved the muscles and developed the physique. In all these occupations my inseparable companion was my younger brother Serge, who, had he not died a tragic death at an early age, would surely have become one of the greatest dancers of all time. The dancing class-room was to us a temple, and our attitude towards our art was as towards a religion.

Only by love and hard work can you become a good dancer — love of hard work and love of the art. Dancing is no art for the faint-hearted. Not a few there were, even in Russia, who, having put their hands to the plough, turned back. The school and the theatre were well rid of them. The sieve had a wide mesh. Only the greatest remained.

Discipline, merciless and unsparing discipline, was the secret of our success, and love of that discipline which triumphed over its pains. The hardest worker I ever knew was my father, Gustav Legat, and he set us a noble example. At the entrance examination to the Theatre School at the age of 16 his *adagio* caused astonishment, for his *developpé* was so advanced that no finished dancer could compare with it. To arrive at this result he had already worked upon himself as a lad for several years without missing a single

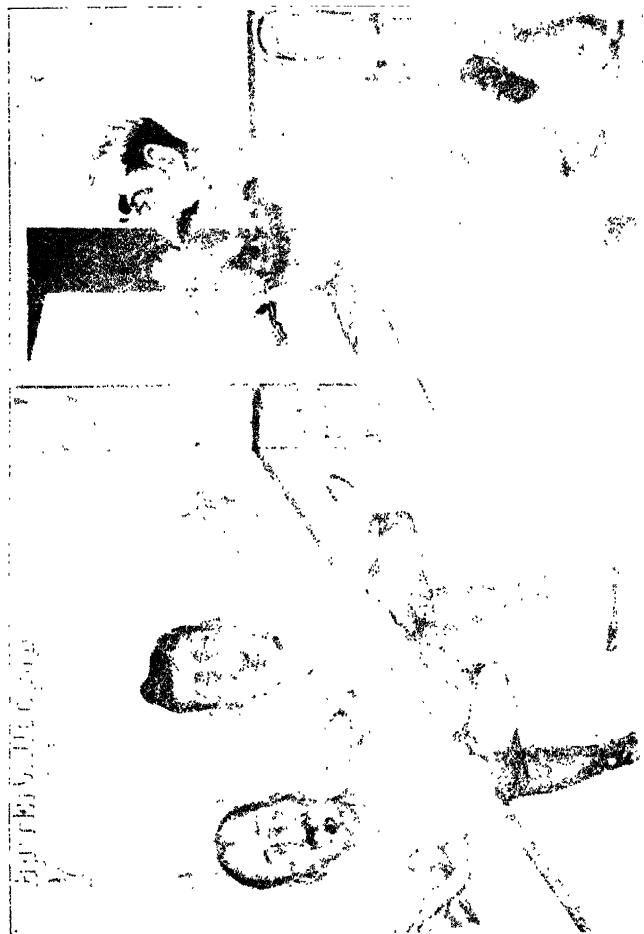
day's work. He lived at Staraya Derevnia, a distance of four miles from the Theatre School. Rising early he would do his exercises in his bedroom. Then, quickly dressing, he walked (the family was very poor) to the school, always clad, even in the depths of winter, in the same light summer overcoat. Before the general class began he managed to get in some work alone, then did the class work together with the other pupils under the instruction of Marius Petipa. After class my father would still stay on and wait the arrival of Christian Johannsen, who came to do his own practice. With him my father would repeat the entire class. He never left the school until he was all but forced out, then once again did the four miles afoot home to Staraya Derevnia, again the exercises in his room, and only then sleep and repose. He always lay on his back, and to develop the turning out of his feet fixed them into the sides of his bed with the instep upwards. In this uncomfortable position he often slept till morning.

Not only did his feet turn outwards to a phenomenal degree, but his legs were astonishingly strong. He was able to lift his leg in a *developpé* with a boy sitting on his foot. Another feat he performed was to carry a glass full of water steadily balanced on the inside of his heel with his leg raised in a *developpé* of the second position. The outward development of his instep had its disadvantages, however. It resulted in a distinct loss of elevation, despite his muscular strength.

Christian Johannsen used to say to us : " Work not only till the sweat comes, but till the blood comes through the pores of the skin — only then you'll be a dancer!" That was the spirit in which we learned to work, never sparing ourselves, and always looking for knowledge from every available source.

When I was a boy I loved athletics. My brother Serge and I — the new Legat "inseparables" — were members of athletic, gymnastic, and rowing clubs. We rowed, swam, did acrobatics and weight-lifting, frequented the circuses, worked with the clowns and tumblers, wrestled, and in addition to this were painters, and musicians in a balalaika orchestra — all at the same time that we were working to become the two first dancers in the Imperial Ballet! It all helped — for one of the principles of the Russian school was rounded-out training. Provided the master-sculptor has the last word in your moulding it matters not where you get your knowledge, or from whom, as long as you get it. But it requires years of work, work, work. I remembered old Johannsen's words, and used to examine my arms and hands when I was nearing exhaustion to see if the blood was actually coming through, as he said it ought!

My father, like Johannsen, was a severe teacher. He started teaching me when I was eight. He used to say : " You'll never be a dancer, you'll play the violin, or become a painter." My little legs worked mechanically, my little heart did not yet understand. But my father never lost hope. He went on drilling me.



I worked with him till I was over twenty. He was merciless in his severity. My brother Serge worked with me. When we had held a *developpé* as long as we could, and still a bit, father would exclaim: "Hold it still longer, you rascals!" And we did. It hurt, but we did it.

One day at the Theatre School, when I was still in the class of Paul Gerdt, the latter was setting a *pas de deux* for myself and Alexandra Vinogradova. He wanted her to leap into my arms in the flight called "the fish." She was afraid. Gerdt said: "I'll show you." He knew my strength. He took a leap several paces away, flew through the air, and landed straight on my outspread arms, where I held him. He must have weighed about 170 pounds.

This strength stood me in good stead as a supporter. Our heaviest ballerinas were featherweight to me. Legnani was the most brilliant of the Italian dancers. Paul Gerdt was her first partner on the Marinsky stage, but one day he hurt his foot, and Petipa said: "Let's see what Legat can do in his place."

After that Legnani always had me as her partner, and for three years we worked together daily. Then Petipa began to allocate to me more and more important rôles, and I danced in over fifty of his productions. In course of time I arrived at a position where I was practically able to dictate exactly what I would do or would not do.

Only by incessant work and untiring application were our dancers made. But our ballet-masters were not made, they were born. Neither Christian Johannsen nor my father ever produced a ballet in their lives. On the other hand, Marius Petipa was a mediocre teacher, but a born choreographer. He was my prototype, and I followed in his steps. From my youth up I observed closely not only how others danced, but how dances were set and arranged. Once, shortly after I had graduated, there came a dancer from Moscow by name Masalova who was a distant relation of mine, and who asked me to set for her a *pas de deux*. I was always fond of experimenting, so I accepted the invitation. *Pas de deux* had theretofore only been set to adagio in slow time. I broke with this tradition, and with my very first experiment took a waltz. It was highly successful, and from that time onward waltzes for *pas de deux* became popular. The waltz became my favourite tempo for *pas de deux*, and I set a great many. One of the best known was the *Valse Caprice* to the music of Rubinstein, which I danced first with Olga Preobrazhenskaya.

I began to be in demand for setting *pas de deux*, *trois*, *quatre*. I discovered in myself an intuitive flair for the latent possibilities of individual dancers. I saw the differences in their relative capacities. I realized exactly in what poses, what movements, what groupings and combinations each would be shown up to the best advantage, having in view individual peculiarities. I sought to elicit and enhance virtues, I sought to mask defects. This was the

secret of my success as a producer. I was never either iconoclast or pioneer of new forms. I was simply a seeker of beauty in individuals.

At Petipa's request I set a good many such *pas de deux*, *trois*, *quatre* in his later ballets. One day, shortly before his daughter, Lubov, was to make her debut, Petipa said to me in his broken Russian: "I want big success. You dance with Lubov. You set dance." The dear old man was so nervous about the event that he was afraid to set the dance himself. I was pretty nervous myself at being set such a task, in such a manner, by such an authority. But when it was over Petipa embraced me and said: "Da, ya vizh ti mozh karasha komposi!" ("Yes, I see thou able good compose!")

A short time after this Paul Gerdt asked me to set the dance for the final examination of his godchild, Tamara Karsavina. He, not unnaturally, regarded her with especial favour, and was anxious that her first important appearance should be a signal success. I chose for her a *pas de deux* from the ballet *Svoenravnaya Zhena* (The Wilful Wife). Drigo accompanied and conducted at the performance. Gerdt set the dances of his other pupils himself, but, like Petipa, he said he feared such a responsibility in the case of a relative. Tamara's partner was to be Theodor Kozloff, who was also graduating, and had been sent from Moscow to complete his training in the senior class under my tuition. Kozloff was one of my best pupils, and I accepted the invita-

tion with pleasure. I set them a very simple but effective *pas de deux* designed to show up Tamara's many natural graces to the maximum of advantage. The dance was an overwhelming success and Karsavina was magnificent. She and Kozloff stood out among all the other participants. Her father (himself an excellent dancer and teacher) and her godfather thanked me profusely.

Recently, on a visit to London from America, where he has made a big name for himself both on the stage and the screen, Theodor Kozloff recalled this incident. "Neither Tamara nor I would have got anywhere without you," he said. It is pleasant to have one's old pupils thus show their appreciation.

This ability to judge of the performers' capacities and show them off to the best advantage is a sort of special sense, very subtle, and not to be acquired by learning. If you haven't got it by nature, you are unlikely ever to acquire it. Both my brother and I possessed it, although it never manifested itself in my father.

My brother Serge was now becoming a prominent dancer, and as everything we did we did together, we began to exercise our imagination in collaborating in the setting of dances. One day the director informed me that it had been decided to invite us to produce a new ballet *The Fairy Doll* at the Hermitage Theatre of the Winter Palace for a special performance at which the Tsar was to be

present. This remarkable invitation confused me at first, for it was naturally expected that only Petipa would be asked to produce at this, the private theatre of the Tsar, and on this ground I saw fit to beg to be excused. But I was told that my creations on the Marinsky stage had attracted very favourable attention, and it was the order of the Director, M. Teliakovsky, that I should produce on this occasion. My brother and I, dancing the two pierrots with the doll Matilda Kshesinskaya, set the ballet together, doing alternately eight bars at time. It met with great success, and the Tsar chose it for a performance at the Marinsky Theatre when he was going to bring his children to the Ballet for the first time. Alas, I was unable to appear at this performance, for I had an accident which left me on crutches for three months. I delegated my rôle to Michel Fokine, then one of my best pupils in the senior class, and there was a furore when Serge and Fokine led me out on the stage on crutches.

There were other ballet-masters in the Imperial Theatre at this time, but all were overshadowed by the titanic Petipa. Nevertheless some good ballets were produced by Lev Ivanoff and Gorsky. One or two Italians, including Cecchetti, also tried their hand at producing, but proved to be better dancers than choreographers. Petipa it was who dominated the choregraphic world, who laid the choregraphic structure of the Russian ballet, and upon the foundations he established all the later choreographers, Fokine, Romanoff and others of marked originality and imagination, built.

The ideal ballet master must have a keen sense of beauty, of groupings, and of the capacities and peculiarities of his artistes. He must also have a quick eye and a ready imagination. Perrot, the French ballet master, who preceded the Petipas, had everything but the quick eye and the ready imagination, and thus failed. He took two years to produce one ballet! He would sit in a circle of silent artistes, thinking. The music would be played. He would think again. The music would be played again. Another silence. Then he would send them all home for the day — the muse hadn't yet inspired him! When he did get inspired the result was beautiful, but what a time it took!

Since Petipa's time there have been many new tendencies in ballet, "iconoclast," "modern," and vague tendencies back to "nature." Some of these tendencies represent valuable and permanent developments in the art, others I regard merely as passing freaks. For iconoclast, orthodox, or modern, every aspiring ballet master is doomed ultimately to failure who prefers the grotesque to the graceful, and who ignores the principle that the secret of beauty lies in simplicity.



CHAPTER IV.

THEATRICAL MEMORIES

A potent factor in the building up of the Imperial ballet was the disciplinary system that reigned in the Imperial theatres. If, at the Theatre School, examiners looked through their fingers at the scholastic shortcomings of promising terpsichorean devotees, no such leniency awaited them once they had blossomed forth either as members of the corps de ballet or to the ranks of the junior soloists.

Woe betide a member of the company who appeared thirty seconds late for rehearsal, or whose practice dress showed the slightest deviation from the ordained standard, or whose *battements* were out of tempo and suggested undue nocturnal gaiety or vigil! We were drilled, with all the severity of a military machine: yet was there no danger of mechanical automatism in our work, for this discipline applied to the company as a whole, while in the classroom each pupil separately was the object of the eagle eye of Johannsen and his associates, and on the stage of Petipa and his associates, seeking individual beauty as well as collective effect.

As members of the Imperial Ballet Company we belonged to the State, or rather, personally to the Emperor. We were his servants, his employees, as an æsthetic institution we were his property. In our lives we were guarded and favoured in many ways with the aim of concentrating our specialization as dancers. To some extent we were a hot-house product. This may not always have promoted our wider individual development as members of a community or a nation, and not many were there among the ballet company who, like my brother and myself, were also professional musicians and painters, broadening our training by a large diversity of parallel interests and occupations. Yet it was this protected specialization which was the secret of the collective artistic purity and perfection of the Imperial ballet, and which made of it, as a unit, a thing of beauty never before and probably never again to be seen.

Thus a slip on the stage, a noticeable fault in execution, was not only a personal defect, it was an offence against the institution and was penalised as such. Only once was I ever fined for malexecution, and though I paid the penalty, I may in all conscience say it was really not my fault, but my partner's, as she admitted. I was dancing with Anna Johannsen, our old professor's daughter. At the conclusion of our *pas de deux* we had to separate towards each end of the stage and execute a pirouette. At the conclusion of my pirouette I saw Anna at the other side of the stage on the floor, and I was subsequently charged with having allowed her to fall. When I was informed of the penalty

I defended myself on the ground that I had performed the dance as set by Petipa, and that any way I couldn't have stopped Anna from falling unless I had an arm twenty feet long. But I was fined ten roubles all the same. Technically the male partner is responsible for the support of his lady in all circumstances, and I was supposed to have foreseen her accident and prevented it.

Once I really did let my partner fall, and by my own fault, yet, oddly enough, this incident passed without penalty. It was in *Tsar Candaule* when I was still a very young dancer. I had to adopt a sitting posture at the base of a statue with one foot stretched forward, and thus await my partner who should throw herself into my arms. By inadvertance or nervousness I put the wrong foot forward, and consequently had not the same balance with which to support the lady when she arrived in my arms. The ballerina was Varvara Nikitina, and I expected when she picked herself up that she would blame me bitterly. I stood before her full of confusion. But all she said was: "No matter, my dear, let's go on," and we ended the dance well. Behind the scenes I burst into tears with shame and apologies. But she was not angry, she took my head in her hands and kissed me, and this touching kindness left an indelible impression on me. Varvara Nikitina was not only a wonderful dancer, she was also a wonderful woman.

I mention these little incidents because young dancers, nervous and self-conscious, are inclined to think they alone

are the victims of stage accidents. Let them take heart. We were all nervous once, and we all made mistakes. I believe you have an English saying that a man who never makes mistakes never makes anything. A baptism of mishap, provided it is not serious, is as salutary for a dancer as a baptism of fire for a soldier. Even the strongest or most highly trained are not immune from accidents. Anna Pavlova was once dropped by Paul Gerdt in *Flora's Awakening*. At the point where she was supposed to fall into his arms he tripped on some object carelessly left lying on the stage, and fell on top of her. Enrico Cecchetti on the occasion of his debut in Petrograd missed a pirouette and "came a cropper" at the conclusion of his solo. But he picked himself up, and when he took his bow he turned a brilliant spin of pirouettes to make up for it.

You can hardly be inspired by mistakes, whether your own or anyone else's, but you may be inspired by the way others conquer misfortunes. When she was quite a young pupil of mine Nadejda Nicolaeva, dancing at the Narodny Dom at Petrograd, had to appear after a scene in which a fountain had played on the stage. In the haste of changing scenes the floor had not been properly dried. Nicolaeva completed a leap on a slippery place, turned somersault, and landed on her face. When she picked herself up blood was trickling both from her face and her right leg. Still she finished the dance amid cheers from the audience. But this applause was nothing to the ovation when she appeared again three minutes later and



danced a difficult tarantelle from start to finish with undiminished brilliance.

In the course of more than thirty years work on the stage I have encountered many strange experiences, but probably the strangest of all was when in the middle of a *pas de deux* I had a row of teeth knocked out at a single blow by my partner. I was dancing with the ballerina Olga Preobrazhenskaya at a charity performance at the Mihailoff Theatre. The audience consisted of the elite of the old Russian aristocracy. We were doing my *Valse Caprice* to the music of Rubinstein, and I had just set my partner off in a spin of pirouettes when she accidentally raised her arm and caught me in the mouth with the full force of her elbow. I felt the blood spurt in my mouth with a horrible gush, but I had sufficient presence of mind to close my lips tightly and support my partner, so that she finished her brilliant movement in a graceful pose. In the enthusiasm of the moment she was quite unconscious of what she had done, and, as for me, I would rather have died than show it. So I finished the dance, including my solo, and managed to appear for two or three bows without anyone suspecting what had occurred. But when at the insistent applause Preobrazhenskaya pulled me by the arm and said: "We shall have to give an encore," I could hold out no longer! I was obliged to open my mouth, and for answer spat four teeth out on the floor. Poor Olga swooned on the spot and was unable to continue the performance. For days she was full of heartrending laments. I tried to make light of it, and many

times after danced with her with no less pleasure and success than before.

But it's an ill wind that blows nobody any good. Lots of children (including many grown-up ones, too!) would have missed a hearty laugh at the grimaces I make with my removable teeth had Preobrazhenskaya not knocked out those that father and mother provided me with.

I had one other serious accident on the stage. I was dancing with Claudia Kulichevskaya in *Pharaoh's Daughter*. The whole of the ballet went splendidly until the last act. Here, at the commencement of a *pas de deux* with my partner, all of a sudden I seemed to hear beneath my left foot a crunching sound. I thought I had trod on a nutshell or some other object dropped on the stage, and was about to step aside, when to my astonishment, I found the foot no longer responded! The foot gave way beneath me, and horrified to find myself a cripple, I hobbled off the stage on the other foot. It appeared that with the last movement of my solo I had torn a tendon in the ankle. Matilda Kshesinskaya sent me home in her carriage, and Prince Volkonsky, director of the Imperial Theatres, sent his Swedish masseur to tend me. For three months I was on crutches, and was able to dance again only six months later. When I appeared in the theatre on crutches everyone crowded round in sympathy, and the dear old Italian regisseur, Coppini, burst into tears. A similar accident to this once happened to that wonderful character dancer, Bekefy.

Once, even after I had been fifteen years on the stage, I suffered a sort of sudden loss of memory immediately before my solo. The whole dance became an utter blank to me — I no longer had the faintest idea how it should start! But even in this extraordinary predicament I did not allow myself to lose self-possession. Vaguely I recalled that my solo began in the centre of the stage. I walked there and stood awaiting the conductor's signal. I cannot describe what ensued otherwise than to say that I "awoke" in the middle of my dance. My whole body danced itself, and "I", so to speak, awoke to it only when the dance was half over! It is miraculous what secrets of power lie stored in the trained members of our body. Legnani told me she once had a similar experience.

This discipline of experience is still more valuable than the discipline of authority to which we were subjected, and of which I have already spoken. As for this latter, a few of us achieved positions where, in the end, we could (and did) practically dictate to the Director of the Imperial Theatres what we should do or not do, in which ballets we should appear and in which we shouldn't (that is, wouldn't). Among the men dancers of my time I alone was in this enviable position, but among the ballerinas there were two who were able to do the same. They were Matilda Kshesinskaya and, later, Anna Pavlova.

This, the most brilliant period of my career, is closely associated in my mind with my late brother Serge, who,

I am convinced, had he lived, would have been one of the greatest artistes of all time. Not only did we undertake many daring feats together, loving a joke and both being full of mischief, but we were jealous of the honour of our fellow-artistes, and especially our ballet colleagues, and though we sometimes played with fire we knew our worth and gambled with it. For instance, on the occasion when our composition *The Fairy Doll* had been produced by Imperial command at the Hermitage Theatre, our ballet formed the last part of the programme, the first two parts being drama and opera. Well, after the performance a special supper was served for the artistes, but when we arrived after concluding the programme, we found that the operatic and dramatic artistes had supped before us and consumed the best of the viands. Serge and I were furious at such treatment of our companions who had given the principal part of the evening's performance, and I got up and publicly announced that "such hospitality did not meet with my approval," and I invited the entire ballet troupe to be my guests at a well-known restaurant, where I would see that everyone had his favourite dish. The regisseur Aistoff, who was with us, was terrified at this proposal, which he said was an insult to the Emperor, and tried to persuade us just to go off home quietly. But I lost patience and insisted on having my own way. At that moment Prince P., director of the Imperial household, entered. Angrily he declared that for such unpardonable insolence Legat must be immediately dismissed from the Imperial ballet. But at this Aistoff stood up for me and answered

that directors of even Imperial households were to be had by the dozen, but Legats couldn't be picked off trees like apples! While they were disputing, my companions and I put on our things and made off, and I gave the whole company a hilarious banquet, which lasted till the small hours of the morning.

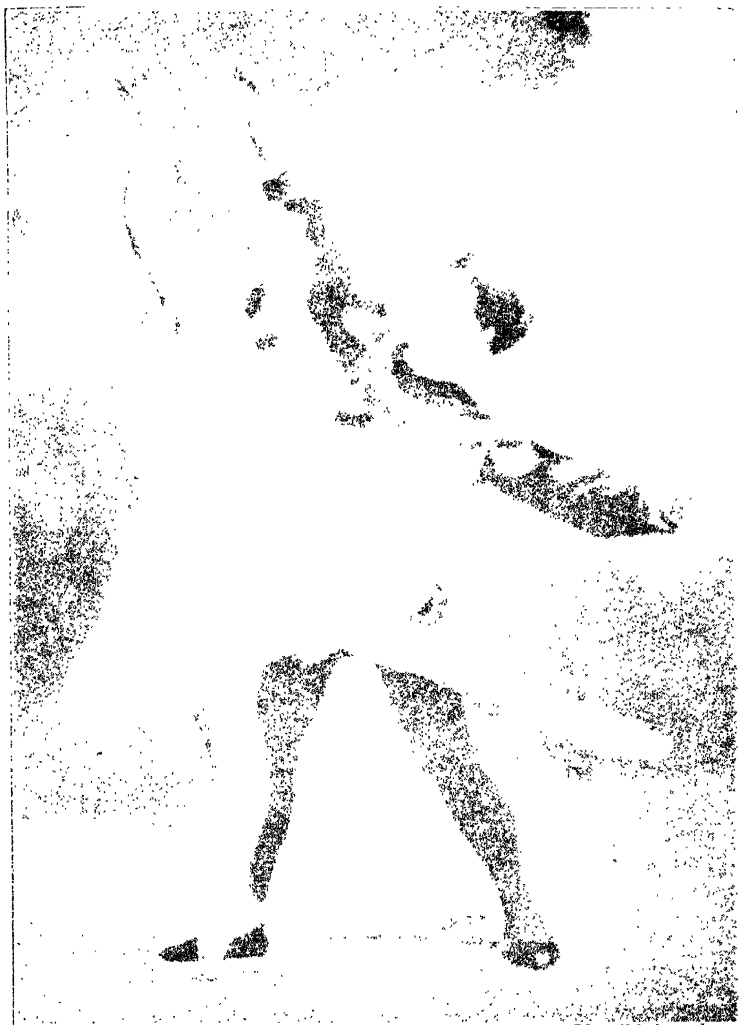
I was a bit frightened by my action all the same. From the formal point of view, of course, my behaviour had been the last word in insubordination. So when I got home I thought it better to call up Matilda Kshesinskaya, who was at that time taking lessons from me and was a great friend of mine, and consult her about it. She promised as soon as she saw the Grand Duke Vladimir Alexandrovitch (who had been sent by the Tsar to congratulate us on our production) to transmit my apologies and intercede on my behalf. Next day Kshesinskaya said she had seen the Grand Duke, and that I need fear no penalties. Not only that, but I was promised that at the next Imperial performance at the Winter Palace the supper would be a thoroughly good one! And so it turned out! After the next performance, a few days later, a luxurious table was spread specially for the members of the ballet, and it was with loud hurrahs that we drank the toast to the Tsar!

The late Emperor was always very kindly disposed to me, and used to call me his "double" because I had a talent for making-up, and could make myself indistinguishable from him at a few paces distance. I received many presents from him, and knew I could always count on his gracious

patronage if I got into difficulties. And I used the power of my position on more than one occasion, though I can honestly say I never once used it for myself alone, but always on behalf of my colleagues as well. I will narrate a practical joke my brother and I played on the stage during a public performance with the object of freeing ourselves and six of our colleagues from an unwelcome engagement. It was such a good joke that I consider it was worth while for its own sake, anyway, quite apart from its aim.

When Prince S. M. Wolkonsky was appointed Director of the Imperial Theatres he set himself the task of raising the standard of opera ballets by having ballerinas and premiers danseurs appear in them instead of second-line dancers as theretofore. The result was that I and my brother Serge found ourselves with twice as much work to do, dancing not only on the regular ballet evenings but also in the operas, which we didn't like at all, regarding (in our youthful conceit) all opera ballets as a sort of surrogate of the "real" thing. So I went to Prince Wolkonsky and protested on behalf of us all against being thus "exploited." But he replied that he was determined to raise the standard of the opera, and ordered us to go on appearing. But we were really fed up, and made up our minds to get out of it at all costs. And this is how we did it.

In the last act of the opera *Freischütz* there is a dance for four couples. For the four ladies' parts Wolkonsky appointed the ballerinas Anna Pavlova, Olga Preobrazhenskaya, Julia Sedova and Vera Trefilova; and



their partners were to be Gerdt, Bekefy, my brother Serge and myself. All four of us wore exactly similar costumes. One night, when this opera had been given a bit too often for our liking, without saying a word to anyone, Serge and I made up our faces in exact replica of Bekefy, and lo, when we all four came out on the stage there was Gerdt and *three* Bekefys! The confusion that arose on the stage was indescribable, for Bekefy, Serge and I were the same height, so it was quite impossible for the ballerinas to distinguish one of us from the other, and they couldn't for the life of them tell who was their partner! The house rocked with laughter and shouted "Bekefy"! Delighted, Bekefy hastened to acknowledge the applause, but like a shot Serge and I were at his side, all of us bowing Bekefys! The performance was held up, so great was the sensation, and I saw the Grand Duke Sergei Mihailovitch splitting his sides in a corner of his box.

Next day I was called by Prince Wolkonsky, severely reprimanded, and threatened with all sorts of disciplinary measures if we made any more fuss about dancing in operas. But I knew he couldn't do without us in the regular ballet performances, and I also knew our trick had been a success, and I boldly replied that unless we were relieved of the unwelcome work at the next performance of that opera there would appear not three Bekefys but four Gerdts! And the result of my ultimatum was a complete — and, let me add, very good-natured — capitulation on the part of the charming director.

I once played a similar trick on A. A. Gorsky, maitre de ballet of the Moscow Grand Theatre. He was invited to St. Petersburg to re-produce the ballet *The Hunchbacked Horse* originally created by Marius Petipa, for the annual benefit performance of the corps de ballet.

Gorsky had a long beard and a very long moustache that drooped either side in oriental fashion. My rôle in the ballet was that of the Khan's chief counsellor. The costumes and scenery had been designed by K. A. Korovine, and when I was discussing with him the question of my make-up I suggested, quite in fun, that I should make myself up exactly like Gorsky. Whether Korovine thought I was serious or not I don't know, but he laughingly said, "All right." At the performance nobody recognised me as Legat, so exactly had I imitated the appearance of Gorsky, and when at the conclusion of the performance Gorsky was called out to the front with all the other artistes the centre of the stage was occupied by two Gorskys, one an oriental prince, the other in evening dress! Gorsky was a little piqued by the laughter of the audience, but we were friends from childhood days, and a bottle or two of champagne soon set things right.

My father once also got himself out of some unwelcome work by using a trick he knew with his feet. In a previous chapter I mentioned his phenomenal ability to turn his feet outwards. He was able to turn his feet out considerably further than the first position, in fact he could actually turn them backwards.

In the opera *Ruslan and Ludmilla* he was appointed to dance a Caucasian folk-dance, Lezginka. Being purely classical in style, my father considered that others would dance this character number just as well as he, if not better. The director, however, insisted. But my father "got his own back" in the following way. In the dance in question the men-dancers hold one arm bent before their face, and thus only the legs and feet of the next figures in front are visible to them. Behind my father was a young man who knew the dance badly, and who, with his eyes fixed on my father's feet, was endeavouring to follow his exact movements. When the dance opened the whole line had to walk around the stage led by my father, while a few bars later they had to turn suddenly and move in the contrary direction. My father moved forward for two or three bars, and then all at once turned his feet so far outwards that they pointed backwards, although he himself continued going forwards. The young novice behind, with his eyes glued to my father's feet thought that my father had turned right about! He twisted round abruptly, the others in line followed suit, and the line was quite upset, and left my father moving across the stage alone with his feet pointing backwards!

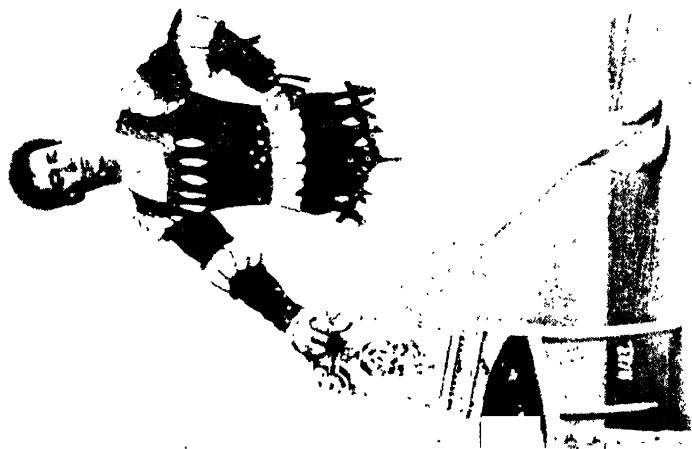
My father was hauled over the coals for this incident, but Petipa and Johannsen both stood up for him. It was not Legat, they said, who turned at the wrong moment, but the others, and if Legat's feet turned well outwards, as became a classical dancer, then he should be praised for it,

not blamed! After this affair my father was taken out of this opera, for which he was very grateful.

I have mentioned that my brother and I were very fond of drawing. Our room was covered with all sorts of sketches. Our tastes lay in the direction of the grotesque, and one day we suddenly thought of trying our hand at caricatures. First Serge had a go at me, and hit off the comic traits of my head very successfully. I followed suit and made a very funny drawing of him. Next we went at our colleagues in the theatre, and from that day became recognised cartoonists.

One day we showed a few cartoons at the Opera, and Stravinsky (father of Igor), urged us to publish an album, to which he would be the first subscriber. We followed his advice and published a collection done in water colours. The album contained ninety-four cartoons of the most famous people of the day in the ballet world. It was published at twenty-five roubles, but in spite of this high price it was quickly sold out. A copy bound in white leather was presented to the Tsar Nicolas II. The title was *The Russian Ballet in Caricature, by the Brothers Nicolas and Serge Legat.*

In view of this success we resolved to issue another large edition at our own expense. Having collected the money we made an arrangement with a publisher, who, when he had printed about forty, decamped with both money and



pictures, and we never saw him again! We had to recommence with another firm, and on the whole deal we lost about seven thousand roubles!

Then the artist P. A. Bergholtz induced us to submit a few cartoons to the Imperial Society of Water Colour Artists. The latter displayed them at their next exhibition, and fixed a price of a hundred roubles apiece. They were bought out the very first day, several of them being purchased by the Grand Duke Vladimir Alexandrovitch, and from that time we became regular exhibitors of that Society, and were made honorary members of it.

I lost everything I possessed in the revolution, including my albums, but many people tell me the cartoons have great historical interest. All the originals are in the Bakhrushin Museum at Moscow, together with many others of our drawings, but I had the good fortune in London to find that my friend and former pupil, Laurent Novikoff, possessed a copy of our chief album in colours. By his courtesy I have had them all reproduced, and a selection of them appear in this book.

Serge was only twenty-eight when he died. All his life we had been inseparable companions, we held everything in common, we thought in common, we worked in common. I was his unfailing guide and preceptor, he never undertook anything without first consulting me, and he refused any offer in which I could not participate. But there was one

side of his nature I was, alas, unable to control. He was highly imaginative and temperamental, and he conceived a mad and hopeless infatuation for a certain person associated with the ballet company. One day when I entered his room I found him lying on the floor with a razor in his hand He was already dead . . .



CHAPTER V.

THE CLASS OF PERFECTION

In 1895, as an outcome of the improved technique of the growing generation of dancers and of the general development of the ballet, Christian Johannsen added a post-graduate class to the Imperial Ballet School. It was called the "Class of Perfection," and its object was to carry on the training of the best dancers after they had graduated from the Theatre School, and were already appearing as artistes on the Imperial stage.

When Johannsen confined his attention to the new class of perfection, I was appointed instructor to the senior boys' class of the Ballet School. The instructor of the senior girls' class was Paul Gerdt, and of the parallel girls' class, Enrico Cecchetti. The class of perfection was attended originally only by graduate women dancers, but Johannsen took into it my brother Serge and myself, and for a long time we were the only men in it. At that time, among prominent dancers in the class, were Anna Johannsen, Varvara Nikitina, Matilda Kshesinskaya, Julia Sedova, Olga Preobrazhenskaya, Marie Petipa (wife of "Marius"), and the youngest of all, Anna Pavlova.

The class was held in the large rehearsal hall next door to the Theatre School. This hall was almost fifty feet square, well lighted and heated, and had a balcony. Its perfect floor, made of pine, was constructed with the same slight slope as the stage of the Marinsky Theatre. Mirrors ran the length of one wall, and the bars were fixed to the three others. All the walls were hung with portraits of great dancers and ballet masters, past and present. It was in every respect an ideal hall for ballet practice, and breathed an atmosphere all its own. In me it inspired a spirit of devotion. Each time I entered it I felt I was entering a temple — the same feeling I had towards the stage of the Marinsky Theatre.

The venerable Christian Johannsen's methods had the regularity of clockwork. He would appear in the classroom a few minutes ahead of time, water the floor himself (to this he attached importance, and was an adept at sprinkling it evenly), and see that all was ready for work. Then he would settle himself by the big mirror with his violin in his hand, and when the pupils were ready, curtly open the class with the minimum of civilities.

There were always more women than men in the Class of Perfection. The men formed the back row, but Johannsen generally placed me in the front of the class, as he used me for demonstration.

The tunes he played on his fiddle were either of his own composition or taken from old-time ballets. After his

death his eldest daughter, Emma, presented me with this fiddle, saying, "With this instrument my father taught you, your brother, your father and many great artistes. Take it now that he has passed his mantle on to you. There is no one he would so much desire should possess it as yourself." I was very profoundly touched and treasured Johannsen's violin for years, until, with all my other possessions, I lost it in the revolution.

I have already described the old man's methods, his versatility, his ingenuity. They lasted until the day he retired. Then there was an interim of a few weeks, during which the former ballerina Sokolova was given a trial as professor of the class. But Johannsen, who continued to supervise, was not satisfied, and told M. Teliakovsky, the Director of the Imperial Theatres, that he would prefer to try me in the job.

In one way it was no surprise to be told that I was to step into Johannsen's shoes, as he had often signalled me out to demonstrate to the class. On the other hand, there was a great difference between unofficially deputizing, and official appointment to the chair he had vacated. I felt the responsibility laid upon me to be enormous, and shrank before this official investiture. But the pupils I inherited from Johannsen were not only sympathetic and encouraging towards their new professor — they were something more. Already, the moment Johannsen had ceased to teach, many of them had come and requested me to form an unofficial

class, which I had done, generally practising myself at the head of it. My official appointment therefore appeared to cause nothing but general satisfaction, although I was much younger than other instructors of the Ballet School.

I have said that stage and classroom were my temple. Let it not be thought, however, that our exercises were performed in an atmosphere of solemnity. It seems to me that any religion that makes you sad instead of joyful cannot be worth much, and we gathered in an atmosphere of gaiety. I always sought to lighten the burden of strenuous exercises by timely jokes and lively music. I enjoyed teaching, and I ardently desired my pupils to enjoy learning.

At the first few lessons Johannsen sat by my side. Extreme age could not dampen his ardour for his life-work nor his desire to see it worthily continued. At the age of over ninety his sight began to fail him, his vision narrowed, he could see clearly only what was straight ahead of him, and was obliged to turn his head to follow the object he wished to see. I felt there was something profoundly impressive, something tragic, in the situation: this old, old professor sitting beside me, his chosen pupil, more than sixty years his junior, transmitting to me his wisdom, anxiously guiding my every act, jealously following my every word, my every command. "Enough of that movement," he would say, "now give them this one . . ." and so on. I was intensely nervous with the nervousness of reverence. To me the old man was the deity of the dance. With all my heart and

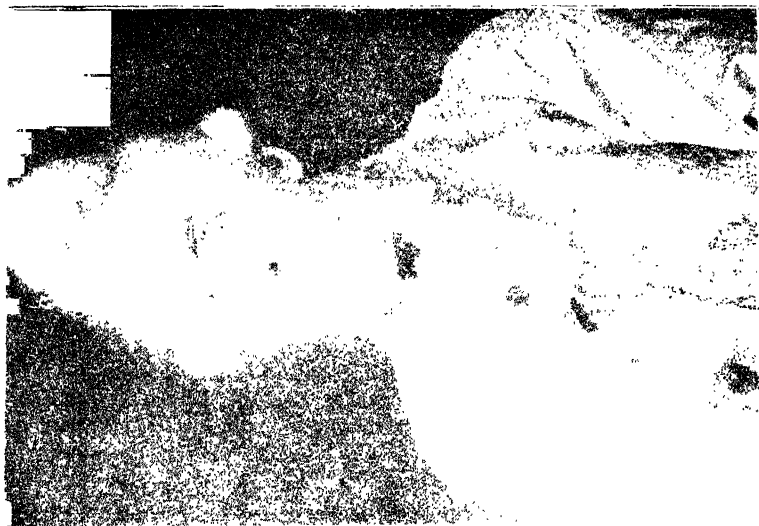
all my soul I desired to hear his blessing: "Well done, good and faithful servant."

But Christian Johannsen rarely said as much as that at a time. His highest praise usually was, "Now you may perform in public." So when at the end of the first class he said to me: "Good. You can go on," I knew I had justified his hopes. He came to two or three more classes, but his corrections and comments became fewer and fewer. At his last visit he sat in silence. Only at the end he grunted: "Good." And I know that when he died a few months later he died satisfied.

The Class of Perfection assembled every morning at 10.30. I followed Johannsen's example, and always arrived five minutes early to prepare the floor myself. Generally I donned a practice costume, consisting of a white shirt, black tights, tightly drawn up to the waist, and white dancing shoes, and in this costume demonstrated the steps I set at the head of the class. All being ready I would call the pupils. The future ballerinas would enter like fairies, tripping lightly, impeccably attired in ballet-skirts of various hues, ethereally beautiful. After them would come the men-dancers, bold and energetic, eager to bear their goddess-like partners skywards. I greeted every one of them separately, were they not all my friends as well as fellow-pupils? After stretching and warming up their legs, they took their places at the bar. I struck a chord on Johannsen's violin, and the class began.

Pliers, battements tendus, fondus, frappés, rond de jambe par terre et en l'air, développés, grands battements, petits battements, port de bras—one after another the exercises followed each other, varied every day, while I closely followed each movement. "In the centre, please! . . . " *Adagio, temps lié*, combinations of every kind, pirouettes and leaps, endless permutations and combinations, never the same twice, and finally the leaps and *tours en l'air* of the boys How indescribably beautiful it was to watch this group of budding virtuosos, all trained in the same school, and therefore all gracefully and silently moving in a perfect symphony of movement! Yet each had his or her particular quality, some secret charm or special ability to be brought out and developed. One had exceptional elevation, another unusual *ballon*, a third brilliant beats, a fourth wonderful *pointes*, a fifth remarkable *développé*, and so forth. If they had difficulty in any particular steps or combinations, I would lay aside my violin and do the movements in front of them, and they would imitate.

Looking back, I see the class as if it were yesterday. Of every pupil I have some particular recollection. There, in the front row, is the inimitable Matilda Kshesinskaya, not only my pupil but also my close friend. Unequalled grace and brilliance were outstanding features of her dancing. How many glorious *pas de deux* we did together on the Marinsky stage, and how we took the Paris Grand Opera House by storm! And how delighted she was when, first of our Russian ballerinas, she did the famous thirty-two *fouettés*!



There next to her is Vera Trefilova, an exquisite piece of Dresden china come to life. She did not long remain in the class — she married and settled down to domestic life, never expecting to return to the stage. Long years passed. Then her husband died. She suffered a stroke and fell seriously ill. It appeared that one leg was partially paralysed. The prospect of dancing again seemed more remote than ever. So I was never so surprised as when one day, after the revolution, she came to me in Petrograd and announced her wish to return to the stage. The problem was a delicate one. Many dancers think if they stop work for a prolonged period they will never be able to recommence. Much harm can be done by over-hasty action. The first day, despite her impatient tears, I permitted her to work a few minutes only. Next day a little more, and so on. The result was that, without a single complaint of sickness or pain, she regained in three months the technique it had taken years originally to acquire. She joined Diaghileff, reappearing on the Parisian stage in the same *Lac des Cygnes* in which, ten years before, she had danced with me at her "farewell" performance, and her many admirers declared her art had in no wise suffered by the long interruption.

There, next to Trefilova, is Tamara Karsavina, exotic and beautiful, conquering all hearts by her penetrating charm. Next to her is Lydia Kyasht and Julia Sedova, Vaganova, Vil and others. And there behind, amongst the boys, are Michel Fokine, Adolf Bolm, Vlaseslav Nijinsky, Theodore Kozloff, Alexander Gavrilloff.

Nijinsky was first brought to the Theatre School by his mother. The first impression he produced on the examining commission was an unfavourable one, for he appeared awkward in manner and delicate in health. But at the doctor's examination I was very struck by the formation of his thigh muscles. As instructor of the senior class, the last word as to the admission of candidates rested with me. I told Nijinsky to move a few paces away and jump. His leap was phenomenal. "That youngster can be made into a fine dancer," I said, and passed him without further ado. I had him put first into the junior boys' class under my brother Serge, but he made such rapid progress that I had him removed very soon to the senior class, and then to the Class of Perfection when I took this over from Johannsen. I set myself to develop those features in him which later distinguished him among all other dancers of his epoch — his phenomenal leap, his brilliant beats, his forceful *developpé*. He created a sensation upon his first appearance in the Marinsky Theatre, and it caused a sort of consternation when (very unjustly to my mind) as a result of breach of discipline, he was dismissed from the Imperial Ballet. Fortunately Diaghileff took him, and he continued his studies under Cecchetti, and Europe saw more of this remarkable dancer than Russia ever did.

And many others there were, too numerous to mention, who in the course of ten years passed through my hands in the Class of Perfection. Several of them, besides working in the class, also studied with me privately. Anna Pavlova

preferred to work separately, and usually had her lessons on the stage of the Marinsky Theatre, preceding rehearsals. She was thus properly warmed up and in the finest trim to rehearse. Sometimes I would don my practice costume and do the whole class with her. Then we were both in the finest fettle for rehearsal. Many, many ballets we danced together. Her favourite, *Giselle*, was also one of my favourites. My other favourite was *Esmeralda* which Kshesinskaya usually danced with me.

Some of these pupils, such as Kozloff, received their early training in Moscow, and were sent to the St. Petersburg school for perfection. But Moscow also turned out some brilliant dancers without our aid, for the Moscow School also followed the principles laid down by Johannsen. Lydia Geiten, Lebedeva, Karpakova, Roslovleva, Katherine Geltzer (who to this day dances in Moscow), V. Tihomiroff, M. Mordkin, A. Volinine and L. Novikoff were products of the Moscow School.

There was, however, much talent that remained in Russia and never became known beyond her borders. For instance, there was a Moscow dancer, Damashoff, who performed the most extraordinary feat I have ever witnessed. This man was of medium height, handsome, with very muscular legs. Having heard much about him, I went one day to watch him exercise. I still remember the gasp I gave when I saw him leap the first time. He seemed literally to remain high in the air and then slowly to descend. He did an *entrechat-huit* on the upward journey and descended with motionless

legs. Then he reversed it, rising with motionless legs, and executing a complete *entrechat-huit* during the descent. Seeing my amazement he said : " Wait, I'll show you something." Now the stage of the Moscow Grand Theatre is about twice as large as that of the Paris Opera or Covent Garden. Seating me on the edge of the Director's box at the corner of the stage, Damashoff walked far away to the most distant corner, leaving the great empty space of the stage between us. I saw him take up a position, I saw him make a powerful movement, and to my unutterable amazement, flying like a bird, he was at my side in three leaps! Had anyone merely told me this was possible, I never would have believed it. Damashoff was a great dancer, but he never left Moscow. He was unknown not only abroad, but even in St. Petersburg, except by reputation.

Besides Nijinsky, Fokine also had good elevation, and of the previous generation Litavkin and Cecchetti both raised themselves like birds. But even Nijinsky's work was child's play compared with Damashoff.

I conducted the Class of Perfection until 1914, when I celebrated my jubilee of twenty-five years' service on the Imperial stage and took a prolonged leave to undertake a tour of Europe with one of my youngest pupils, Nadejda Nicolaeva, who already presaged that wide development and daring enterprise which later made her excel, not only in classical, but also in acrobatic and modern dancing. But

our tour of that year was sadly disturbed by war's alarms. Before that I had had many invitations to leave Russia, but refused them all, making an exception only to appear with Kshesinskaya and Trefilova in Paris, and to do a European tour with Anna Pavlova in 1910. This latter was a very happy tour. We spent the days practising, the evenings performing, and the nights playing poker! When at the Opera Comique, Paris, Vera Trefilova and I were offered fifty thousand dollars a month if we would go to America, but Vera was about to get married, and I was contracted to return to Russia. It was in the year of my tour with Pavlova that Diaghileff first approached me to join his newly-formed company. But I occupied at that time simultaneously the three positions of first dancer and ballet-master at the Marinsky Theatre, and director of the Class of Perfection; my salary was the highest ever paid in the history of the Ballet; I felt my destiny inseparably linked with Russia, and I elected to remain there.

Perhaps, had I been able to see twelve years ahead, and had caught a vision of myself fleeing from the Bolsheviks with little but the clothes on my back, I might have chosen differently.

Forebodings of impending tragedy weighed upon me in January, 1914, at my jubilee performance in the Marinsky Theatre. The Emperor Nicolas II and all his family were in the Imperial box. As fate would have it, it was not only my last appearance on my beloved Marinsky stage, it was also the Tsar's last visit to the Marinsky Theatre. A

few months later the Great War broke out, followed by the still greater horrors of revolution. It was a terrible day for me when I heard of the brutal murder of the Emperor and all his family by the Bolsheviks.

I remember my strange heaviness of heart, even amidst the acclamations of the brilliant audience, on that occasion of my jubilee, and I attributed it at the time to my even temporarily parting from my beloved stage. But now I think, did my premonition lie deeper?

The enthusiasm of the evening was in no way affected thereby. With the inimitable Matilda Kshesinskaya I danced to perfection my favourite ballet *Esmeralda* and at the conclusion, when all other presentations had been made, I received the Tsar's gift of a large gold cigar case bearing the Imperial double eagle, and a certificate conferring the title of "Soloist of His Majesty," accompanied by a pension for life — which, of course, I never drew.

The first years of this century marked the acme of development of the Imperial ballet, and the height of perfection of the Russian school of dancing. The history of the growth of both centres round the history of two men, Marius Petipa and Christian Johannessen. Learning and borrowing from everywhere, chiefly from French, Scandinavian and Italians, they merged their gathered knowledge and experience, fermenting it with the genius of the Russian national character in the epoch of its florescence, and thus built up the eclectic system known as the Russian School.

Will ever again the possibility exist in allocating rôles in a single theatre to select from such a list of artistes: Matilda Kshesinskaya, Varvara Nikitina, Anna Johannsen, Kulichevskaya, Marie Anderson, Anna Pavlova, Olga Preobrazhenskaya, Julia Sedova, Tamara Karsavina, Vil, A. Vaganova, Lydia Kyasht, Lubov Egorova, Gerdt, Bekefy, Obukoff, Theodor Kozloff, Fokine, Nijinsky, Tihomiroff, Mordkin, Volinine, Novikoff, Smoltzoff — to name but a few, for still the list is far from complete! This was the full bloom of the Russian Imperial Ballet, a height of general perfection never reached elsewhere than on the stage of the two principal Imperial Theatres, the Marinsky at St. Petersburg, and the Grand at Moscow.

Since I last danced in one of those theatres seventeen long years have passed, many of them in wanderings and exile. I look back and wonder . . . Where are the happy days of the flowering of Russian art, fostered by a benevolent and beauty-loving monarch? Gone, as the sun obliterated by raging storms! Gone, like flowers withered in icy winds! Gone, with all the beauty of our Russian life!

And in place of high art and unself-seeking patronage, the world abounds in fungus growths and adventurers in art, pushing spurious wares, acquired by imitation at second or third hand, as if they were original and authorised goods!

Not in this day or in this age shall another such majestic artistic edifice arise as crumbled in the ruins of the Russian revolution. But we, the product of that artistic culture,

must give to other countries the benefit of that we know, and hand down the treasures we received. In the four quarters of the globe I behold the greatest dancers of my generation, many of them my pupils, upholding the standard of the Great Art, and if I am proud at the sight it is not merely a personal pride, but a national pride, that we, in things material and political the despised and rejected of men, shall live forever in thus transmitting a spark of the otherwise inexpressible Soul of Russia. With this ideal I live, and with this ideal untarnished I shall die.

APPENDIX

LIST OF BALLETS IN WHICH NICOLAS LEGAT APPEARED

STUDENT PERIOD

Ballet			Produced by	
Daughter of the Snows	Petipa
Pharaoh's Daughter	Petipa
Paquaretta	Petipa
Mlada	Petipa
Rozana	Petipa
Night and Day	Petipa
The King's Orders	Petipa
Zaraiya	Petipa
Deva Dunaya	Petipa

LIST OF BALLETS
IN WHICH NICOLAS LEGAT APPEARED
(Continued)
AS PRINCIPAL SOLOIST OR IN LEADING ROLE

Ballet	Produced by	Appeared with Ballerinas
Gazelda	Perrot (renewed by Petipa)	M. Anderson
Zolushka	Petipa	P. Legnani
The Enchanted Forest	L. Ivanoff	M. Gorshenko
Pupils of Dupre	Petipa & L. Ivanoff	
Calcabrino	Petipa	C. Brianza
Sylvia	Petipa	P. Legnani
L'Aventure de Damis	Petipa	O. Preobrazhenskaya
Golubaya Georgina	L. Ivanoff	M. Anderson
Waterman's Holiday	L. Ivanoff	V. Rikhliakova
The Wilful Wife	Perrot (renewed by Petipa)	M. Kshesinskaya
Sylphide	Petipa	V. Kulichevskaya
Vestalka	Petipa	
The Harlem Tulip	L. Ivanoff	
Le Marché de Paris	Petipa	
Love's Power	L. Ivanoff	V. Rikhliakova
Nymph and Satyr	L. Ivanoff (renewed by N. Legat)	A. Vinogradova

LIST OF BALLETS — (Contd.)

Ballet	Produced by	Appeared with Ballerinas
Catherine Paquita	Cecchetti Petipa	A. Nedremskaya A. Johannsen V. Kulichevskaya
Le Corsaire	Petipa	V. Rikhliakova
Bayaderka	Petipa	A. Johannsen V. Kulichevskaya Anna Pavlova
The Magic Mirror	Petipa	M. Kshesinskaya
The Mikado's Daughter	L. Ivanoff	V. Rikhliakova
Blue Beard	N. Legat	
Fiametta	St. Leon (renewed by Petipa)	M. Kshesinskaya
Faust	Perrot (renewed by Petipa)	M. Kshesinskaya
Arlekinada	Petipa	O. Preobrazhenskaya
The Fairy Doll	N. and S. Legat	M. Kshesinskaya V. Trefilova
Le Roi Candaule	Petipa	M. Kshesinskaya E. Vil V. Nikitina
La Source	St. Leon (renewed by Petipa)	O. Preobrazhenskaya A. Vaganova V. Trefilova
Casse-Noisette	Petipa & L. Ivanoff	Delera V. Trefilova O. Preobrazhenskaya
Kermess	N. Legat	O. Preobrazhenskaya
Caprices d'un Papillon	Petipa	L. Roslovleva

LIST OF BALLETS — (Contd.)

Ballet	Produced by	Appeared with Ballerinas
The Hump-backed Horse	Petipa	P. Legnani M. Kshesinskaya
La Fille Mal Gardée	Petipa	Anna Pavlova V. Trefilova O. Preobrazhenskaya
Giselle	St. Leon (renewed by Petipa)	H. Grimaldi Anna Pavlova
Flora's Awakening	Petipa	O. Preobrazhenskaya
Talisman	N. Legat	M. Kshesinskaya
Raymonde	Petipa	O. Preobrazhenskaya V. Trefilova
Don Quixote	Petipa	M. Kshesinskaya Anna Pavlova V. Trefilova O. Preobrazhenskaya
The Sleeping Beauty	Petipa	M. Kshesinskaya J. Sedova V. Trefilova O. Preobrazhenskaya
La Lac des Cygnes	Petipa	Anna Pavlova V. Trefilova O. Preobrazhenskaya
Coppelia	Petipa	N. Nicolaeva Zambelli M. Kshesinskaya V. Trefilova J. Sedova E. Geltzer O. Preobrazhenskaya N. Nicolaeva

LIST OF BALLETS — (Contd.)

Puss in Boots	N. Legat	M. Kshesinskaya
The Purple Flower	N. Legat	O. Preobrazhenskaya
Esmeralda	Petipa	M. Kshesinskaya
The Enchanted	L. Ivanoff	A. Johannsen
Flute		N. Nicolaeva
Two Thieves	N. Legat	N. Nicolaeva
The White Lily	N. Legat	N. Nicolaeva
The Rose of	Margita N. Legat	N. Nicolaeva
The Prince's	N. Legat	N. Nicolaeva
Enchanted Dream		

Nicolas Legat also appeared in several of these productions in various countries of Europe, and, during the period when he was instructor to the company of Serge Diaghileff, took parts in Carnival, Petroushka, and La Boutique Fantasque.

**LIST OF BALLETS
PRODUCED BY NICOLAS LEGAT**

The Fairy Doll (first performance at Imperial Hermitage Theatre at royal command).

Blue Beard (for jubilee of Paul Gerdt).

The Four Seasons (for jubilee of Alexander Glazounoff).

Two Thieves.

Puss in Boots.

The Purple Flower.

The Prince's Enchanted Dream.

Rose of Margita.

The White Lily.

Kermess.

Talisman.

The Khan's Dream.

La Chasse de Diane.

Nymph and Satyr.

Nicolas Legat also composed a very large number of dance items which were either performed separately or were incorporated in the ballets of other producers.

The Dancing Times

Editor P. J. S. Richardson

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